

Cooling Out in the Process of Track Placement of Students (An Example of Fatih/ Istanbul)

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Abstract

Students graduating from elementary education are suggested to attend different kinds of high schools via track placement. According to conflict paradigm, this process is misleading and those students coming from low socioeconomic status are directed to vocational education instead of academical programs. In the process of track placement, counselors use the process of cooling out students who wish to continue academic programs. This research aims to determine if this process is practiced in Turkey or not. The participants of this research are final year students from randomly chosen classrooms in low, middle, and upper socioeconomic schools in Fatih district in Istanbul. The results indicate that high socioeconomic status students' achievement is higher than low and average socioeconomic status students' achievement. Moreover, while the class achievement predicts SBS scores, the socioeconomic status of schools predicts the type of schools suggested to students. According to these results, low socioeconomic status students are tracked placement to vocational and technical high schools. These findings are in line with the conflict paradigm in educational sociology.

Key Words

Cooling Out, Counselor, Track Placement, Elementary Education.

One expected function of guidance services in the educational process is the track placement function. Track placement service is expected to direct students to upper educational institutions according to students' abilities and interests. Directing track placement of service in accordance with student's interests and abilities placement a suitable of the institution of higher education is expected.

Young students, especially at the elementary level should be given this service in order to give an effective track placement service in secondary education.

At the end of the eight-year elementary education, deciding whether the students will continue to secondary education or not and the area to which they should be directed if they continue are the most critical decisions in the process of vocational development (Yeşilyaprak, 2004). If students are helped to select the most appropriate type of high school for themselves via an effective track placement service, they will make the decision to pick a profession much easier in the next educational level.

The track placement services in elementary schools in Turkey are conducted according to the "Primary Routing Regulation". According to this regulation, a track placement form is prepared for each student when the students are at the level of graduation. The classroom teacher and counselor propose

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a suitable type of school (academic, vocational or fine arts high schools) to the students. This regulation emphasizes that track placement is not compulsory and makes only suggestions to the students (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2003).

It is hardly possible that the guidelines specified in the regulation are fully implemented in Turkish schools. The research findings point out that guidance and track placement services in elementary schools are unscientific, because of the excess number of students, schools and counselors cannot do a careful and thorough track placement, track placement activities do not meet the students' expectations, and interests and abilities of the students are not adequately taken into consideration in the process of track placement (Alpaslan, 1993; Aşık, 2008; Güler, 2007; MEB, 2000; Saylan & Gürkan, 1998). These results suggest that track placement activities are not seriously conducted in elementary schools and there are important problems in this process.

One of the points highlighted in the track placement that forcing students should be avoided and the final decision should be left to students (Özgiven, 1999; Yeşilyaprak, 2004)

In the light of the above statements, it is obvious that students should be presented emerging alternatives in accordance with the students' adequacy, interests and characteristics in the process of track placement. Students will give their own decision according to these alternatives. However, there are writers suggesting that these principles are not practiced there are contradictory practices while conducting track placement. These writers report that the students' advisers manipulate students according to students' cultural and social class features. Low-status students (from lower social classes) are tracked placement to low-status schools and professions and these students, who want a high-status professions and schools, are discouraged and lead to change their decisions.

The concept of "Cooling out" was first coined by Burton Clark. Clark (1960) revealed the dilemmas faced by the students in a Community College accepting low-status students by acting on Goodman's (1952) work. Clark observed that institutions accepting low socio economic students do not discourage them to eliminate their unrealistic academic and career expectations as thought. According to Clark, those students who are incapable of reaching to the high academic standards of a college are kindly tracked placement to another program which will be easier on them. Clark gives

the name of "cooling out" to this demoralization of track placement process.

Research results on cooling out are parallel with Clark's opinion. In fact, those students who enrolled to community colleges in the U.S initially want to transfer to the four years colleges but these students quit this desire and continue their education because these community colleges use the process of cooling out and raise institutional obstacles for these students (Alba & Lavin, 1981; Anderson, 1981, 1984; Astin, 1977; Dougherty, 1987, 1992, 1994; Karabel, 1972; Monk-Turner, 1983; Richardson, Fisk, & Okum, 1983).

Here, it should be stated that Clark (1960) considers the cooling out process as a socially acceptable act and a process which meets humanly the expectations of students. In contrast, there are writers who think that this process deceives students, prevents those students who are females, from different races, and low socio-economic status from going to higher level and high status academic programs, and leads them the vocational and technical programs teaching low status vocations (Brint, & Karabel, 1989; Kaliszewski, 1988; Karabel, 1972; Moore, 1975; Zwerling, 1976). The researches about this issue have discovered findings supporting both ideas. Baird (1971) and Davis (1997) did not find any relationship between students' experiences of cooling out and their race, gender, and socio-economic status. However, there are researches claiming that there is a relationship between students' experiences of cooling out and their race, gender, and socio-economic status. According to later researchers, the white, Asians, males, and high socio-economic status students are positively affected from this process (Bahr, 2004; Brookover & Erickson, 1975; Hilsabeck, 1998; Kaliszewski, 1988).

Although mostly the students from the higher education participated in the researches about the cooling out process, it can be said that the same process is valid for all those levels of education in which there is guidance. For example, those researches done on high schools to which low socio-economic status students attend revealed that counselors discourage students (Erickson 1975; Heyns, 1974; Resh, 1998; Rosenbaum, 1976; Zalaquett, 2005) Another research states that counselors have sexual prejudice against female students, especially against successful female students who are discouraged (Resh & Erhard, 2002).

In the light of these explanations, when we look at the situation in Turkey, it can be seen that there are

researchers mostly about the quality and the level of the guidance practice but there are hardly any researches about the decisions that counselors give in the process of guidance and there are a few researches about low socio-economic status students in the process of guidance (Özcan, 1985; Şemin, 1975).

This research aims to determine if last year elementary school students experience any cooling out process in guidance. The following questions are tried to answer for this purpose:

- 1) Does the average of students' classroom achievement vary in terms of the socio-economic level of the school?
- 2) Does the average of students' classroom achievements predict SBS achievement score?
- 3) Do the socio-economic status of schools and the gender of students predict the type of school that will be suggested to the students?

Method

Research Model

Causal-comparison model was used in this research (Karadağ, 2009). The independent variables of the research are; (i) the elementary school's socio economic status, (ii) students' GPA (4-8 grade), and (iii) students' gender. The dependent variable of the research is school type suggested to students.

Fixed effect model is used to analyze the data (Hovardaoğlu, 2000). For this reason, results of this study are valid only for these research participants.

Participants

The participants consist of 8th grade students in three elementary schools (in terms of low, middle, and high socio-economic status) in Fatih, İstanbul.

Instruments

The data were obtained from GPA averages of students provided by the school administrations, the secondary schools entrance examination (SBS) scores, and track placement forms. The data were collected during the fall 2010-2011 academic year.

Data Analysis

Data analysis used with regard to the first, second, and third sub-problem are one-way ANOVA, linear regression, and logistic regression respectively.

Findings

The findings of this research are:

- 1) Especially, those students attending to low socio-economic status schools are suggested vocational and technical high schools. Two thirds of the students in middle socio-economic status schools are suggested vocational and technical high schools.
- 2) There is no difference in average student achievement in respect to socio-economic status of schools. According to Tukey test, the students in higher socio-economic status (SES) schools are more successful than those attending to middle and low SES schools. On the other hand, eta squared value (η^2) was calculated to determine the effect size of the school SES independent variable. When eta square value ($\eta^2 = .07$) obtained from the SES variable is examined, it can be seen that the SES value has a medium size effect on students' achievement (Cohen, 1988).
- 3) The average classroom achievement affects significantly and positively the SBS achievement and classroom achievement can explain 65% of the change in the SBS achievement. That is, 65% of the total variance related to SBS scores can be explained by students' average classroom achievement. Thus, a student's average classroom achievement is a significant and strong predictor of the score she will receive at SBS. Moreover, low, medium, and high SES can predict 44%, 77%, and 79% of the change in the students' SBS scores in the school respectively.
- 4) It has been determined that the SES of the school to which students attend and the average students' classroom achievement predicts the school suggested to the students. It can be seen that the SES of the schools six times more important than the average achievement. That is to say, the most important determinant of the school type which counselor suggest to the students is the SES of the school. An interesting point in this research is that there is no gender discrimination towards students.

Result and Discussion

An important issue in Turkey in recent years is guidance. Guidance was one of the main points in the changes for Turkish educational system in the 15th National Education Council (MEB, 1996). The issues that most students attend to general high schools and the number of the students preferring vocational and technical high schools is low are criticized problems that need to be solved. Thus,

57% and 43% of the students attend to general and vocational and technical high schools respectively in the 2009-2010 school year (MEB, 2010). Although it has been constantly stated that these ratios should be reversed and most of the students need to attend to vocational and technical high schools, it is obvious that there is hardly any success about this issue. On the other hand, the question needed to be answered is this: will the students profile of vocational and technical schools change? This is an important question since those students in such schools are coming from the low SES families (Esmer, 1979; Köse, 1990; Pakır, 2006; Şahin, 2007; Türk, 2007; Zobar, 2006). Counseling services has an important role in changing the student profile of these schools.

Although the importance of guidance process is stressed in Turkey, the factors affecting this process such as attitudes and prejudices of especially counselors and other authorized officials are not thoroughly examined. The concerned officials do not completely know the prejudices, thoughts, and other factors affecting them while deciding about students. For example, is there a prejudice against the students coming from low SES that they can only attend to vocational and technical high schools and are counselors affected by these prejudices while deciding? According to the result of this research, the council suggests students vocational and technical schools if their school is in a low SES neighborhood. This situation raises the questions if the teachers are giving grades to their students more than they deserve and the counselors believe that the grades do not reflect the reality. Is this the reason for not taking into consideration the students' grades? In this research, - at least for the students participating in this research- in order to determine if this perception reflects the reality or not, students' average classroom achievement and SBS scores are analyzed and it has been found that the average classroom achievement predicts students' SBS scores, i.e., the students whose grades were high received high scores from the SBS. For this reason, the perception that teachers give unjust grades or students are given grades more than they deserve lose validity.

When the issue is examined in respect to guidance system of Turkey, it is obvious that there are various problems in this field. Since the reports prepared in guidance studies have no enforcing and binding power, such studies are perceived as if they are merely formality in schools (Güler, 2007). Students also do not take into consideration the guidance

form and they select the school they and their parents want (Aşık, 2008). However, the decisions in guidance are not inspected if they are correct or not. As it was studied in this research, whether some stereotype (such as poor students can go to only vocational and technical high schools) affect the decisions or not has not been revealed.

As a result, the most important finding of this research is that low SES students are suggested the vocational and technical high schools. This situation is consistent with the conflict paradigm which is a fundamental paradigm in the area of educational sociology. According to this paradigm, current educational system maintains the existing inequalities and social class discrimination in a society. According to this thought, it is not possible for a student coming from a low SES family to have a good education in a prestigious school, have a high status profession, and be a member of a higher social class no matter how adequate she is (Apple, 1979, 1980; Ballantine, 1993; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1977, 1981, 1983; Gordon, 1991; Gutek, 1997; İnal, 2004; McLaren, 2005). According to conflict paradigm, one of arrangements preventing low SES students from attending to high status schools and having a high status profession is the discouragement of students.

The last year low SES elementary school students face the cooling out process. In this way, students are tracked placement to vocational and technical high schools appropriate to their social class without being subjected to coercion. Thus, low SES students are prevented from passing to high SES in the future. However, most of the low SES students need guidance and counseling services because the educational level of their parents and the people around them is low and these students receive very little help from them (Magen & Chen, 1988; Polat, 2008). Moreover, the students tend to accept the decision of their advisors (Moore & Devanport, 1990). The research in this area argue that the counseling services given to the students coming from disadvantaged environment make them successful and significantly help their placement to higher education (McDonough, 2004; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1996).

In the light of these results, there are some measures need to be done. Counselors and teachers need to gain awareness of equal opportunities in education and educational sociology. This can possible by giving in-service education to counselors and sociology course in pre-service education to those who want to be a teacher or counselor in the future. On

the other hand, the Ministry of Education should hold counselors accountable for their practices. Accountability is the responsibility to evaluate the results of the services and determination of the effectiveness of the services (Baker, 2000). That is, the effectiveness of counseling and guidance services should be done according to the standards that can be evaluated and compared by others (Brott, 2006). There should be accountability to the students and their parents as well as the school administration and the Ministry of Education.

The generalization of the results of this research is limited because of the small study group. However, the same limitation is valid for experimental researches too. This kind of research should be repeated in order to make the results more certain. However, the issue might be common since the results are very meaningful even for a small study group.

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